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ABSTRACT

The role of high school principals can be compared to that of composers of music. For instance, composers put musical components together into a coherent whole; similarly, principals organize high schools by establishing class schedules, assigning roles to subordinates, and maintaining a safe and orderly learning environment. Second, composers select instruments, texts for music, and styles of music for certain genres; likewise, principals deal with curriculum and instruction, funds and facilities, school-community relations, and services to students and personnel. The role of high school principals can also be compared to that of conductors. For example, both roles involve efficiency in organizational affairs and problem analysis; both roles involve judgment and decisiveness; both roles involve leadership and sensitivity; both roles involve stress and tolerance; and both roles necessitate efficient communication. It is more pleasing to conceive of the role of principals as artistic rather than concerned with management principles. Included are 22 reference notes. (RG)

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THE ARTISTIC NATURE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

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The Artistic Nature of the High School Principal

Robert E. Ritschel

Educational writers have often relied on business management theories when attempting to explain the tasks of the school administrator. One frequently quoted authority is management consultant, Peter Drucker. In his book, The Practice of Management, Drucker describes the role of manager in this manner:

> The manager has the task of creating a true whole that is larger than the sum of its parts, a productive entity that turns out more than the sum of the resources put into it. One analogy is the conductor of a symphony orchestra, through whose effort, vision and leadership, individual instrumental parts that are so much noise by themselves become the living whole of music. But the conductor has the composer's score; he is only interpreter, The manager is both composer and conductor. [1]

The purpose of this article is to apply Drucker's analogy of composer and conductor to the high school principal. He must act as both the composer and conductor in order to achieve the art of education.

The Composer

The composer of music is faced with a perplexing problem. He must be creative, and at times innovative; yet adhere to acceptable restraints in form, rhythm, harmony, melody, and dynamics. He realizes that his work may be accepted or rejected, performed masterfully or perhaps misinterpreted. His composition is a product of both his intellectual understanding of the art form as well as his personal influence, emotion, and expressiveness. Not all composers are the same; some are thought to be

better than others, the great ones withstand the test of time.

A person possessing "vision, willingness to experiment and change, the capacity to tolerate messiness, the ability to take the long-term view, and a willingness to revise systems" could very well describe the workings of the composer while practicing his craft. These qualities, however, were listed by Rallis and Highsmith in a recent Phi Delta Kappan article in outlining the role of the principal.[2] Just as the composer must coordinate the diversified elements of music into a meaningful whole, so too the principal must initiate some structure to the high school. He must establish class schedules, assign roles to staff and faculty, and maintain an orderly and safe environment conducive to learning.[3]

Successful composers develop competencies for using various combinations of instruments or voices, setting texts to music, or selecting appropriate styles of music for certain genre. A survey reported by Donald Walters found that principals likewise must develop their skills in dealing with curriculum and instruction, funds and facilities, school-community relations, pupil personnel services, and professional support services.[4]

Ernest Boyer writes in High School, "In schools where achivement was high and where there was a clear sense of community, we found, invariably, that the principal made the difference. Like a symphony orchestra, the high school must be more than the sum of its parts."[5] Not all principals are the same; some are obvi-

better than others, the great ones withstand the test of time.

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ously better than others. Perhaps the great ones will stand the test of time. However, today's principal is likely to agree with the philosophy expressed by the popular jazz composer, Duke Ellington, "We're not worried about writing for posterity. We just want to sound good right now."[6] And for many high school principals, just getting through each day makes it good enough right now.

The Conductor

The workings of the conductor remarkably parallel those of the high school principal. The conductor must bring together the complete coordination of composition and musicians into one performing, expressive artistic experience. Any failure on his part to complete the tasks will result in a bland, if not disastrous performance.

The close association of these two roles (principal/conductor) can be better explained with the assistance of Figure One. The National Association of Secondary School Principals has documented the behaviors and skills of "high performing principals."[7] A brief description follows each skill which shows how it may be applied to the conductor.

These skills have often appeared in the literature when describing characteristics of effective principals. With a slight variation these catagories are presented for additional discussion:

NASSP Principal Skills Related to Conductors

SKILL	PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY	CONDUCTOR ACTIVITY
Problem Analysis	Data Collection and Analysis	Score study to anticipate problem areas of performance; analyzing composer intent
Judgment	Critical evaluation & decision making	Rehearsing composition;evaluating musician performance; detecting errors
Decisiveness	Acting when a decision is needed	Deciding upon appropriate action when error detected: difficult passage, unclear notation,etc.
Organizational Ability	Planning and Scheduling personnel & resources	Planning and scheduling of rehearsals for each composition, for every performance: what musicians are required during rehearsals. What compositions to program from season to season.
Leadership	Guiding others to act	The consummate leader in all phases of the art: all performers rely opon his ability to guide them to the successful completion of a concert
Sensitivity	Awareness of other's needs	Ability to interact with performers to achieve a higher goal of an inspirational performance
Stress Tolerance	Performing under pressure	Pressures abound: rehearsals, multiple performances under varying conditions; audience expectations, and subsequent approval (or disapproval) Critic acclaim/ridicule
Communication	Speaking and writing skills	Conveying directions to musicians; encouraging patron support

Figure 1: NASSP Principal Skills Related to Conductors

Organizational Ability/Problem Analysis; Judgment/Decisiveness; Leadership/Sensitivity; Stress Tolerance; and Communication.

Organizational Ability/Problem Analysis

The conductor must be highly skilled in these two areas. After decisionsare made regarding the works to be performed, he must plan what players are required and how many rehearsals are needed in order to meet the concert date. In each rehearsal he must quickly analyze the performance problem and take appropriate action to solve it. He must carefully bring the performing ensemble to a peak experience (the concert) without allowing the music to grow stale through over rehearsing.

The principal's role in this area is as complex as the conductor's. The American Association of School Administrator's publication, Guidelines for the Preparation of School Administrators describes the organizational activities a principal may encounter:

> designing, implementing, and evaluating a school climate improvement program; understanding political theory; developing a systematic school curriculum program; learning to manage the various components of instructional systems; assessing and implementing staff development and evaluation activities;managing resources, human and financial; and conducting research and using research findings in educational management settings.[8]

Judgment/Decisiveness

The activities of the conductor in this area are described in Figure One. His task is to evaluate every sound

made by the ensemble in relation to how he perceives the proper production of the sound as indicated by the score. If the sound is too loud or soft; too weak or forceful; too much of one instrument and not enough of another; incorrect pitch or rhythm; or its relationship to the sound which preceded it or the one to follow is inappropriate he must decide on the proper course of action to correct whatever problem may have occurred. A master conductor recognizes that this skill area, often referred to as rehearsal technique, will make the difference between a performance which is rather perfunctory, or one in which both the musicians and the audience are glad they were there to share the experience.

The principal does not have the benefit of a rehearsal before undergoing public scrutiny of his effectiveness in these areas. His "rehearsal technique",or activites which require some everyday decisions, are illustrated in Figure Two.

Fig.2 Ten Daily Activities for Principals *

ROLE :	SAMPLE ACTIVITY
Figurehead	Completes all state, federal, and local documents and surveys required, e.g. ADA, PL 94-142, etc.
Leader	Serves as supervisor of subordinates, designates committees and assigns membership
Liaison	Judges what civic organizations to attend; interacts with parents and social agencies
Monitor	Receives information from teachers and students, decides upon appropriate action
Disseminator	Decides upon need for faculty meetings, judges what items to include on agenda
Spokesperson	Judges what activites of school are worthy of media attention; serves as informational source

Entrepreneur	Decides what curriculum or course changes are necessary; initiates change
Disturbance Handler	Judges proper action to resolve conflict among/ between teachers and/or students
Resource Allocator	Assigns teacher schedules, decides upon extra-curricular activities, authorizes expenditures
Negotiator	Provides solution for opposing parties, e.g. student vs. student; teacher vs. teacher, etc.

*From Henry Mintzberg, The Nature of Managerial Work, Chapter Four.[9]

Mintzberg offers an indication of how these diversified activites may affect the principal. He writes, "In most jobs, no matter what the level, it is the incumbent himself who determines whether he will control the job or the job will control him."[10]

Leadership/Sensitivity

A conductor is the titular leader of the performing ensemble. He is the recognized authority, and often his word is accepted without question. Although this may be acceptable among the professional ranks, it is hoped that some glimmer of warmth and sensitivity may be observed in conductors associated with educational institutions. Effective conductors are also persons who have empathy for their musicians, and understand that their reason for participating is because of the love and enjoyment of music.

Jo Ann Mazzarella's discussion of the principal as leader offers a close comparison to the preceding paragraph. She argues that the days of school administrators who, like generals, measured their effectiveness by whether the troops obeyed are gone. Administrators are no longer interested in having the power to give

unquestioned orders; they are now interested in having the ability to influence.[11] The effective principal understands that teachers generally teach because of the love for young people and the fulfillment they receive from students who desire to learn.

A 1975 survey by Jack Spiess contains two supporting points to this discussion:[12]

> 1. The effective leader should be able to...facilitate goal achievement is the leader's success in helping the group accomplish the task at hand. (Described by NASSP as "guiding others to act" in Fig. 1)
>
> 2. Group maintenance is the leader's ability to maintain good interpersonal relations within the group. (Described by NASSP as "awareness of other's needs")

Spiess provides a caveat for those seeking to find a detailed description of effective school administrators: "While nearly everyone has what it takes to be an effective leader in some situations, almost no one can lead effectively in all situations."[13] The catch becomes the ability to match the <u>right</u> principal with the <u>right</u> faculty in the <u>right</u> school within the <u>right</u> community. No small task, yet extremely important. Ernest Boyer writes, "strong leadership will be needed to pull together the separate elements in the school and make them work. Rebuilding excellence in education means ...freeing leadership to lead.[14]

Finally, Kenneth Eble, author of <u>The Art of Administration</u>, offers an appropriate point of view for principals (and conductors) for placing this skill area in proper perspective:

> This...is a plea to all administrators to believe that the business of life is more important than

> the management of personnel, that civility and compassion are as important to administering as regulating and enforcing, and that one can find in administration joy, or, if not that, the great satisfactions that come from being able to contribute to the joys and satisfactions of others.[15]

Stress/Tolerance

The conductor is under constant pressure to achieve the maximum performance from his ensemble - anything less is unacceptable. During a performance he realizes that every movement, every expression in his face and body, will convey a meaning to the performers. One inappropriate gesture could lead to a horrific experience for the conductor, the musicians, and the audience. The only one to bear this stressful burden, the only one to blame, is the conductor.

The stressors for the high school principal are both plentiful and have numerous origins. Walter Gmelch conducted a survey of Oregon principals in which he identified these top ten stressors for educational administrators:[16]

1. Complying with state, federal, and organizational rules and policies.
2. Feeling that meetings take up too much time
3. Trying to complete reports and other paperwork on time
4. Trying to gain financial support for programs
5. Trying to resolve personnel conflicts
6. Evaluating staff member's performance
7. Having to make decisions that affect the lives of individual people that I know (colleagues, staff)
8. Feelings that I have too heavy a workload, one that I cannot finish during the normal workday
9. Imposing excessively high expectations on myself
10. Being interrupted frequently by telephone calls

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Suggestions for coping with stress are likely to be found on every seminar program for educational administrators. It is conceded that little can be done to reduce stress; however, many suggestions are made regarding how to manage or cope with it. Some authors suggest that the principal "must be flexible to changing circumstances, tolerant of ambiguity, and have an attitude directed toward inquiry and novelty."[17] Other sources contend that aerobic exercise, systematic relaxation and even meditation are good stress preventors.[18] I believe that Maurice Vanderpool offers perhaps the best suggestion of stress tolerance, especially for the neophyte principal:

> Administrators should share their thoughts with a peer support group and should break away from the idea that asking for help is a sign of weakness.[19]

Communication

The role of the conductor as communicator is best illustrated by his responsibility of bringing the notes on the page to life. He must convey the meaning and spirit of the notation to the musicians and they, in turn, must capture the expressive import of the music and convey this feeling to the listeners. If there is a breakdown in the process it becomes, once again, the fault of the conductor. He must be the "great communicator" of the composer's intent, or there is very little reason for the music to be performed.

Having well-developed communication skills is a necessity for

effective principals. Some principals may believe that if they speak or write clearly they are communicating. Perhaps, but not necessarily...communication is a two-way process of sharing information. This means the principal must be adept at listening as well as speaking. Because principals communicate daily with students, teachers, staff personnel, parents, and other administrators it is likely that at some point the communication cycle may experience a breakdown. Charles Jung reports that there is no real trick to good communication; the only secret is having a sincere interest in the other person.[20]

One of the most valuable studies of the principal's role in communication was one done by Valentine, Tate, Seagren, and Lammel. They found that a significant relationship exists between what an administrator says and the "climate" or "tone" of his school. The authors found that, "Generally speaking, the more direct the principal, the more positive the attitudes of teachers, students, and parents." In addition, they found that "the use of humor...indicated a significantly relaxed, positive human relations atmosphere."[21] If the principal fails in this area, his effectiveness will be limited to resemble the inept conductor...and the school will be hampered by his limitations.

Epilogue

After making this effort of applying Drucker's analogy of composer and conductor to the high school principal the question

must now be asked: Where does this lead us? Do good principals make good conductors? Probably not. Do good conductors make good principals? Perhaps not. I think it should be allowed, however, that effective principals carryout their role more like artists, rather than disciples of management theories. And I suggest that where Elliot Eisner describes the "teacher" as"craftsperson and artist" the words "principal" and "composer/conductor" could be easily substituted without jeopardizing the intent of his anology:

> I believe the image of the teacher as craftsperson and and artist is an ideal toward which we should strive. I believe that our intellectual roots have mistakenly regarded such images as suspect....Craftspersons and artists tend to care a great deal about what they do, they get a great deal of satisfaction from the journey as well as from the destination, they take pride in their work, and they are among the first to appreciate quality. Is such an image really inappropriate today? I hope not. I hope such an image always has a place in our schools.

Eisner concludes by offering, "And somehow, just somehow, I think that in the private moments of our professional lives, we do too." [22]

NOTES

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10. Mintzberg, ibid.

11. Jo Ann Mazzarella, Leadership Effectiveness, ACSA School Management Digest, Series 1, No. 16. Prepared by ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1979.

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14. Boyer, High School.

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17. Phillip Hunsaker, William Mudgett, and Bayard Wynne, "Assessing and Developing Administrators for Turbulent Environments," in The Best of ERIC, Vol 3, 1982.

18. James Quick and Jonathan Quick, "Reducing Stress Through Preventive Management," in The Best of ERIC, ibid.

19. Maurice Vanderpool, "School Administrators under Stress," Principal, (March 1981). NOTE: Article in November 1987 issue of Educational Leadership, "Peer Coaching for Principals" supports this suggestion.

20. Charles Jung,et.al. "Interpersonal Communications: Participant Materials and Leader's Manual," in School Leadership.

21. Jerry Valentine, et.al. "Administrative Verbal Behavior: What You Say Does Make a Difference." NASSP Bulletin (December, 1975).

22. Ee Eisner, "The ARt and Craft of Teaching," Educational Leadership (January,1983).